

Feminist Film Criticism: Theory and Practice

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This article arises out of a workshop on principles of feminist film criticism given by Maureen Turim and myself at the Midwest Women's Film Conference in Madison in June, 1973. At that time our goal was to set out some theoretical guidelines or parameters. We also wanted to share with the women there our own experience as critics both in the women's press and in college journals where we hoped to establish a feminist presence. I consider myself a socialist feminist and much of this paper reflects my own experience writing for the radical press and teaching film theory and aesthetics as well as working in a feminist filmmaking group, which have been my major political activities. In general both Maureen and I would advance the principles stated in the editorial in the last issue of *Women and Film*, in particular on the necessary role of theory in establishing a feminist cinema.

The Practice of the Feminist Critic:

The critic herself determines what is *feminist* in her review. If she makes her relation to the women's movement and her politics in general clear to the readers, she provokes a political response both to her review and to the film at hand. This is not to say that the readers expect a précis of the critic's political stance in each article she writes. Rather, a woman's articles over a period of time plus the kinds of references she makes to activities and issues in the women's movement and to political issues in general make her politics clear. More candor about one's politics in film reviews is useful in dispelling once and for all the idea that the media just provides entertainment or that we have to take what we are offered; politics and culture are inseparable and the feminist critic has ideas on how to fight sexism in film. When I myself say that I am a socialist feminist, that means that I see the major forms of oppression in our society—sexual, class, and racial oppression, in particular—as interrelated and that women's oppression must be fought by collective action against those institutions which are built on class, racial, and sexual oppression: namely, the institutions of capitalism. That the critic put a label on herself as a certain kind of feminist is not so important as her making explicit the assumptions which underly her analysis of film and her value

judgments about films. For example, if she makes the judgment, "Film X is merely reformist," the critic can help her readers come to the same conclusion if she shows the ways in which a given film, particularly a political film, is reformist and what a preferable alternative would be.

Film criticism refers to a specific kind of writing with a specific function in the United States—that of a consumer's guide. Like a book reviewer in a magazine or Sunday supplement, the film critic traditionally has the right to make generalizations about culture and *mores*. Thus feminists can conveniently use this ready-made journalistic vehicle not only to attack sexism in a film but also to evaluate the social milieu that generates that film. Furthermore, as a consumer's guide, feminist criticism feeds the growing appreciation of long-neglected women's films and hopefully will provide a basis on which to evaluate and constructively criticize those films. Men are also writing anti-sexist criticism—hopefully their numbers will increase—but here I shall use the term *feminist* to apply only to women.

Women who write film criticism write for a certain audience. The militancy of an article may depend both on the type of publication and the intended audience. Many fine women critics, a number of whom are film scholars, write for the established press. However, it is only recently—probably in the context of a broader public awareness of ideas springing from the women's movement—that we can see an anti-sexist perspective in the work of both men and women critics in the established press.

Women reviewers and film scholars whose work I admire—Penelope Gilliatt, Renata Adler, Susan Sontag, Claire Clouzot, Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier¹—established themselves as critics without specifically considering issues of sexism. Just as *Women and Film* has asked that more be written on women's films, not necessarily feminist films, we need articles on the work of these women. But for now I would like to concentrate on feminist criticism as such.

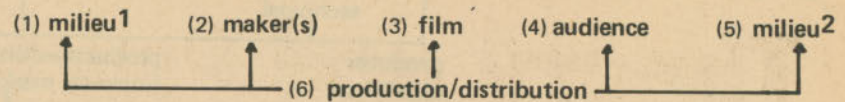
Because of their socialization, feminists often feel more confident writing about culture for the underground press or women's papers

or newsletters since the alternate media, both staff and readership, sympathetically receives militant film reviews. However, both Maureen and I have had the experience that once on the staff of the mixed underground paper or a radical or cultural magazine, as feminists we had to struggle to write as authorities in other areas as well as about women's affairs. For Maureen, this meant writing about more than just grotesquely sexist films or else explicitly feminist films. Thus she had to insist that the films which are in the *auteurist* pantheon, such as those of Peckinpah, were not exempt from a feminist critique. To fight the liberalism of having feminist articles mainly in the "safe" area of culture, women in any mixed publication have also found that they have to push for an explicitly anti-sexist stance in all the articles in the publication as a whole. All types of local women's publications need and want feminist film criticism and this is an excellent place to start because very often first articles come out of a good political discussion with other women and, once published, stimulate more discussion from readers, especially women readers, from whom the local critic can receive feedback.

Women and Film offers an outlet for critics, both women and men, who want not only to combat sexism in the established cinema but also to help create a new place for women in film. Such criticism is rapidly moving beyond a critique of the mechanisms of sexism in the content of individual films to feminist perspectives on film theory and a support for and evaluation of the work of women in film. The magazine attracts a readership specifically interested in feminism, the media, or both (Isn't everyone interested in the movies?). The magazine has proven a useful resource for women's courses, where it can be passed around to interested women. *Women and Film* also has a mixed readership of men and women among film buffs, film teachers and students, and radical critics of film and literature. The impact on cinema education seems to be the magazine's most immediate pay-off, and for that reason alone we need all our women critics to join us to make their influence felt now.

I mentioned the direct influence feminist film criticism has on women's courses. Such criticism should have an effect on other

The Schema in Brief:



institutions as well, hopefully especially on the production and distribution of films. First of all, as a critique of the established film industry—its history, its present practice, its international perspective—feminist criticism can bring neglected films to our attention and also demythologize some of cinema's traditional heroes and themes (A good example of such necessary demythologizing is Constance Penley's article on Bergman in the last issue of *Women and Film*). Hopefully feminist criticism will ever increasingly help women film makers, both by describing their films and by offering these women a political and an aesthetic critique.

Even more, unlike establishment film criticism, feminist film criticism can and should aid feminist political activity. Many women are using the media in forms that do not have professional distribution: 8mm or video. They are often using the media specifically as a local organizing tool. The content of their work and the technical and political mechanisms of such projects must be presented in detail so that other women can benefit immediately in their own political projects, either by using some of the material that has already been prepared or by learning how to use film and video in similar ways in their own women's groups.

Theory:

In order to write effectively and to give her readers, especially women readers, a way to evaluate cinema themselves, the feminist film critic must work out for herself a theoretical framework to encompass the whole range of issues related to film. Her theory governs what she says to what readership, what aspects of films she will write about, what effect she hopes to gain from her criticism. A good theory includes an explanation of the mechanisms operating *within* the film (form, content, etc.) and the mechanisms that go beyond the product that is the film (such as the film industry, distribution, audience expectation, etc.).

The following schema is a useful theoretical tool to consider film as a total process, from its inception to its reception by an audience. It allows us to account for changes due to reception in a different historical period from which the film was made.²

I shall go over the schema in parts to indicate how it is useful to consider each area when writing about women and film.

One: The prefilmic milieu, in the widest sense, includes past history as well as the present situation. Milieu¹ encompasses both the economic base of the filmmaker's milieu as well as the ideological superstructure. In the schema, milieu¹ is placed linearly before the maker(s) only to indicate that this is the situation prior to and in which the film is made. By working her way through this entire schema in criticizing any one film, the critic herself can elaborate some of the interrelations between ideological superstructure and economic base, particularly as regards the mechanisms of sexism.³

That sexism which we can find in almost all of established cinema can be found in cinematic tradition, language structures, artistic conventions (especially in the photographing of women), social conventions and specific social situations. These are all part of milieu¹, and embedded in these structures and experiences we find the maker(s) of the film at the time of making. Since the whole of milieu¹ has been and still is overwhelmingly sexist, even a self-consciously feminist director will find it hard to make a film which rebuts sexism in all areas. She has many pressures on her from milieu¹, which the critic should examine, and her films reveal not only a rejection of sexist social conventions from milieu¹ but artistic ones as well.

Two: The maker in film, as opposed to many visual and literary artists, is almost always not a single individual but a collective entity. In many of the contemporary women's films, such as the San Francisco Newsreel women's *The Woman's Film*, the director is not named as the maker and we are led to think that the technical crew, the sound mix person, actors and editors worked together collectively and non-hierarchically and that all had some control over the final film. Film processors are also "makers" of a film yet are not esteemed as such. One must ask in relation to the area of technique, why so few of the new women filmmakers are concentrating on experimental films, experimental in technique and form.

Three: The completed film is the principal

object of traditional film study and of semiological studies such as those of Christian Metz. Although such analysis is extremely important for our understanding of film, hopefully feminist film criticism will constantly relate film to milieu with a specific vision of how sexism can be attacked.

Four: The audience for the completed film can be considered in both individual and collective terms.

Five: The audience's milieu is always to some extent historically/temporally/spatially/socially different from the maker's milieu, and the audience brings its experience with its milieu to its judgment of a film. Feminist film criticism, in attacking sexism and promoting women's films, will hopefully have a favorable effect on milieu². The minimum effect which we would hope that feminist film criticism would have would be to get people to view the films that are a part of their milieu in a new way.⁴

Women viewing and discussing films in a women's studies course or at a women's conference may want to get together by themselves in a group to discuss the films seen since their experience of women's oppression gives them a "milieu" different from that of the male viewers or from the makers. For example, I have seen that a group of women discussing *The Godfather* by themselves express different reactions than in a mixed discussion of the same film. To utilize the fact that under the right circumstances women can bring the experience of their oppression to bear on their judgment of a film, the Ann Arbor Women's Film Collective ran a free weekend film conference several years ago, showing traditional Hollywood films incorporating various images of women. After each showing they had discussions of the films in men's groups and women's groups so that the women could come to a consensus about their relation to the mass media with their own milieu.

Six: The production/distribution system is shown in the schema as affecting all other sub-systems. Involved in distribution are producers, distributors, exhibitors, critics and audiences—all of whom are influenced by the economic base of the society in which they live. Although sexism in cinema is

The Schema Elaborated:

----- = feedback loop

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graph LR
    milieu1[milieu 1] --> maker[maker]
    maker -- "(weak) collective 'director'" --> film[film]
    film --> audience[audience]
    audience --> milieu2[milieu 2]
    milieu2 -. "feedback loop" .-> milieu1

    subgraph EconomicBase [economic base, either capitalism or socialism]
        direction TB
        PD[producer distributor exhibitor]
        PDC[production/distribution<br/>(includes marketing and consumption)]
        C[critic]
    end

    PD --> milieu1
    PDC --> film
    C --> audience
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The film-audience relation is one to study in detail, particularly historically, for the film shapes the audience's mind as well as draws on conventions already present in milieu.¹ For example, do teenage women want to fall in love because of real experience or do they want to live up to the myth? Film is

one ideological product among many that has kept "selling" the myth of love. In the economy, the myth is used in advertising to sell products: it implies love is guaranteed with an object's purchase. Feminist filmmakers such as Nelly Kaplan attack the love myth in its representation in the cinema precisely because it is an oppressive myth incorporated into the super-ego of women. However, although women filmmakers and women critics attack the love myth as oppressive, few have attacked the entire dominant concept, which sees romantic love as necessary for a woman's major satisfaction in life. Thus, few films show the possibility of a woman's living happily without being in an intense emotional/sexual relation with one other person, i.e., being part of a "couple." Christina Rochefort, whose film and novel *Les Stances a Sophie* attacks the concept of romantic married love still relies on the very concept of love to describe woman's fulfillment in her Utopia as she presents it in her book *Archaios*. Couldn't we imagine women living happily together without being in a "couple" situation, or imagine them deriving their major satisfaction from areas other than intense sexual satisfaction? This is not meant as puritanical, but many films have shown male adventurers, scientists, soldiers, fliers, businessmen, etc. as getting their primary satisfaction from a role other than that of romantic love (or, as the other option is for women, from fatherly love!).

When writing about a feminist film, or about any political film, the critic must evaluate what effect this film hopes to have on its audience. And what effect it actually has. Does it intend to provoke specific changes in milieu²? How? If milieu² is left relatively untouched, the critic can note this and set forth her ideas on more radical uses for film. A film which is a mere social critique ends with an audience saying, "Isn't that terrible! I cried to see it." A more radical work shapes the audience's mind, leaving the viewers with structures which go beyond their consciousness prior to viewing. They then have a tool with which to reevaluate that which they had previously accepted as "natural." In a didactic radical film, such a change in consciousness should be accompanied by a picture of how things can be changed, which is a necessary precondition for the audience's acting in a new way after

the film is over.

The production-distribution system, interacting directly with all five other sub-systems and technical and critical mediations, is the determinant system within the whole: it has the greatest impact of all the sub-systems on the whole. In most countries, film production has been institutionalized so that feature films are made in remarkably similar ways. And women are not predominant in the production of films. We know that Russian and Eastern European films are also generally sexist, and we may or may not be satisfied with *The Red Detachment of Women* (I am with the content, but not the form—reminiscent of *Seven Brides for Seven Brothers*—nor with Chinese restrictions on film production). It is a phenomenon that Godard noticed when he talks about Mos Films-Paramount. Even though the films are produced under a socialist economic system, the films are still oppressive and similar in form to capitalistic films.⁶

Women and Film needs to document in detail the position of women within the process of production of Hollywood films. We must also note *how* it is that women can begin to produce films more or less independently—tracing the sources of available income and distribution. Even though we have felt the impact of the women's movement in our daily lives, the direct input of the women's movement or of the woman consumer on the general feature film market is almost nil. Indeed, films are not constructed with an eye to the reality of social relations but rather continue to reflect male (and bourgeois male) ideals. Distributors do not ask us what kind of films we want to see.

Women are struggling to open alternate circuits of distribution⁷ because the established distribution agencies reject politically sensitive films. However, these rare alternative circuits—distributing 16mm prints, usually in colleges and schools—reach mostly the already "convinced." It would be better for women if there were a mass feminist distribution linked to political activity; at minimum, to audience education. Since the critic plays a crucial role in distribution, *Women and Film* can publicize and encourage the work of women's alternative distribution circuits and also

describe in greater detail the radical political use of their films.

The Critic's Personal and Political Stance

In addition to and related to her theoretical framework, the critic brings to bear on films her own likes and dislikes, education, class (usually middle), and—of special concern to us—her relation to the women's movement and her social and political practice. Intellectually, the critic must be aware of her critical preferences; for example, which aspects of the above schema does she consistently deal with in writing a film review? In addition, any woman who begins to write *feminist* criticism soon notices in what ways her reviews differ from others on the same film—and this is information that can fruitfully be passed on to her readers, for by learning about what is sexist (or feminist) in reviews, readers learn more about the film process as a whole. One's own immediate impressions of a film, a vignette of how the entire audience was responding, and one's emotional reactions are details that give liveliness and immediacy to a review.

However, it is only when the critic writes with her politics up front that the readers can respond in kind and make a political critique of both the film and the review. Otherwise the reader may dismiss the reviewer's judgment as, "You (the reviewer) liked that film and I didn't." I expect a woman writer to let me know where she stands not only in relation to the women's movement, but to various aspects of that movement (e.g., liberal reformist, radical lesbian, separatist, etc.) and to socialist politics as well. As a socialist feminist, I may have political disagreements with another socialist feminist critic, such as Joan Mellen, about her specific politics, but when she presents a definite position (as Joan does), my reactions are both clear and politically principled. Thus her reviews go far beyond being a mere consumer guide—the mark of criticism in the established bourgeois press.

When a woman works out in her criticism her ideas about class, sexual politics, love, women's goals, money, authority, etc., this gives her criticism real political strength. When a woman wants to write about new

uses for women's films, it is particularly valuable to bring to bear her own organizing experience in the women's movement. For by writing criticism informed by theory and political practice, a feminist critic makes a *political* critique of film and film criticism, which in turn makes it possible for the readers to respond to her on a number of specific levels. On the one hand, the reader can respond with "I don't agree with what you said about class or race in that film or with your political analysis." Or the reader may give a contrary political interpretation to a film: "You say the film is progressive for a number of reasons; however, I think the major character, with whom we identify, sold out. These are the reasons why." The point is that the critic owes it to her readers to make her own basic assumptions perfectly clear so that the reader's response may also be lucid.

I myself tend to evaluate radical reviews both in terms of my theoretical schema and the politics of the review. That is, I ask if the reviewer considers more than the form and content of the artifact, the film, and treats the whole film process? I also expect to be able to evaluate the reviewer's political premises critically, which she is asking the reader to do if she sets them clearly forth.

Form and Content of the Film⁸

Most film criticism has traditionally centered around an analysis of the artifact, the film. Although not sufficient as an exclusive approach to film, a feminist perspective should be applied to an analysis of the form and content of both traditional narrative film and women's films. We are oriented to write criticism of the film itself rather than the whole film process (milieu¹—maker(s)—film—audience—milieu²) because of the close relation between film and literary criticism. We bring to film criticism New Critical, psychoanalytic and structuralist approaches already applied to literature in the academic world. *Auteur* criticism is, for example, marked by a psychoanalytic approach—the search for themes, archetypes, underlying psychological patterns.

Since most films are sexist in both form and content—and this includes documentaries, feature fiction films, and experimental films

that are not abstractions—the feminist critic finds herself coming to terms with the fact that she, like most women, still enjoys these films. We have not abandoned Hollywood nor the whole bulk of past films. However, and here women in audiences already differ, some women flatly reject films sexist in content but their definition of a sexist film differs from woman to woman.

At this point the feminist critic finds herself criticizing films other women may praise and finding reasons to like films others may reject as sexist. I can give a few examples from my own reviewing experience. I rejected *Carnal Knowledge* as a smug film appealing voyeuristically to precisely those men "denounced" in the story of the film; other women, reading the film on the level of content, saw the film as an attack on sexism. Similarly, *Cries and Whispers* was generally hailed as a "women's film" but Constance Penley denounced Bergman's manipulation of women's experience, his mystification of that experience only to serve his Art. Again from my point of view, I enjoyed *A Clockwork Orange* and *Lolita*, reading Kubrick's satire as misanthropy rather than misogyny. I put in these personal examples to indicate that it is at this level that feminist film criticism currently engages movie goers in lively debates, and that analyses of content from a feminist perspective are both popular and useful.

Because of the example of some very talented women who have given us images of strong, unconventional, rebellious women in film, critics such as Naome Gilbert (*Women and Film* Issue #2) have emphasized the need for women directors to give us new female role models in film. While equally enthusiastic about seeing such strong women characters, I see a danger in raising the strong-female role model to the level of prescription, i.e., "This is where women's film should go." On the one hand, the whole concept of hero (or anti-hero) in narrative film is a carry-over from nineteenth century romantic literature, and certainly Eisenstein's example has shown that an emphasis on a single character's fate and interior development is neither necessary nor particularly desirable. In *I am Somebody*, Madeline Anderson shows the role of women, even concentrating on one

specific woman, during a hospital strike, but she places much more emphasis on the relation between class, sexual, and racial oppression and on the need for united action than on the delineation of a character that might serve as a model on which to specifically pattern our lives.

We also need more films that delineate women's situations, women's problems without showing the women characters as strong, liberated or rebellious. An accurate portrayal of women's oppression is just as rare as accurate portrayals of racial oppression—since films are usually made by white males. In particular we have no feature films presenting a view of the lives of lesbians. Such films could be realistic and not heroic and serve the function of raising consciousness, for they would at every point be set in the context of women's oppression.

In the analysis of the content of films, the critic can draw on anthropological, sociological, and economic concepts and/or use feature films to illustrate these points. Obviously film, like literature, is a structured, artificial work; there is a great danger in referring to the characters' experiences as if they were part of lived reality. However, the choice of subject for a film, costume, makeup, locale, social class, dialogue, psychological traits, social interaction all enter a film from the context of the maker(s)' milieu. Claire Johnston in *Notes for a Woman's Cinema* cautions against an analysis of women characters in film by means of reference to sexism in the society at large because she sees these female characters often as male inversions. However, most of the articles in *Women and Film* that deal with specific films make references to social phenomena freely and fruitfully. Some areas that have not been explored, and hopefully some of the women going into anthropological film making can help us here, are studies of proxemics in film—the distance between characters as indicative of social mores—and kinesics—gesture and movement as determined by social convention and as revealing conventions—for such studies could open up new dimensions in our understanding of the mechanisms of sexism in both art and the society that engenders that art.⁹

Studies of women and the media today

inevitably consider not only how women are sex objects but how women as sex object (and its corollary: mother) serves an economic function. *Women and Film* has had articles on two of Godard's films in which he examines the implications of women's role as an object to be consumed, as did the feminist critique of the First Annual Erotic Film Festival. Significantly Carol Davidson points out that although Godard in *Letter to Jane* says he is criticizing Jane Fonda, the star, as a function and not as a person, he not only sees her as a function but *uses* her as a function as well. Would as many people have gone to see *Letter to Jean-Pierre*?

The Politics of Form

Most critics do not separate their discussion of form from the content of the film, this is appropriate enough if one considers form and content as finally inseparable, but it is not satisfactory if the reviewer has simply failed to reflect on how the form affects the content. At the same time, in considering a large number of films, we can see that film form and the way of photographing women in general has in the past been inherently sexist. Makeup, the selection of women with certain size breasts, halo lighting, the whole visual iconography of women characters, and so forth, can be analyzed in detail to write the story of sexism in film. But even more, in considering film form, one should analyze where women are not, what attributes they are *not* given.

In an adventure film, men find fulfillment and self-definition through direct physical action, initiated by themselves for the end of their own integrity. Women are not allotted the same range of physical action, and when they do act, their actions are usually more circumscribed. To give an example, *Evel Knievel*, *Two Lane Blacktop*, *The Last American Hero*, and *American Graffiti* show men initiating such actions to prove their identity (both social and personal identity) as drag racing, stock car racing and motorcycle stunts. The women in these films do not initiate such actions independently but relate to the actions of the men and are dependent on them. One can take a movie such as *Day of the Jackal* and note that it would be unlikely to have

an equivalent female assassin or females employing that assassin or a comparable female target to be assassinated—as if any of this were desirable. Male characters are given attributes of power much more than female characters are.

Forms for conveying sensuality are almost completely male. We don't even know yet what the visual form for a female erotic movie would be. Women so far, even when making films, have found it hard to break through to making new kinds of films with new forms. Technical experimentation with the media has so far been done by male filmmakers. There are few women making experimental films, pushing the medium itself as far as they can, perhaps this is because the technical/chemical/mechanical side of film has been traditionally of more interest or more accessible to men, women being socialized to enter cinema through its aspect as art.¹⁰

Godard talks about a bourgeois camera style and rejects traditional documentary or cinema vérité. These only reproduce the so-called "normal" way of seeing things; certainly the subject of a film is never reality but only the way the maker(s) sees something. Feminist film criticism should offer sisters making films, perhaps especially documentaries, a critique of the form of their presentation. There is a great temptation to film women activists or the average woman living out her life and to let the subject "speak for herself." However all cinema-vérité dates fast, and in particular the filmmaker who thinks the subject is speaking for himself/herself (as Leacock/Pennebaker in *David* or *Don't Look Back*) ends up putting the filmmaker's opinions about class, sex, race, etc. into the *form* of the film. It is better to be aware of one's own presuppositions and state them directly, either visually or verbally, so that they will be immediately subjected to a conscious critique by the audience.

Functions of Criticism

If she writes mostly about the content and form of specific films, the feminist critic faces the problem of just fitting into a slot already prepared for her—that of writing a consumer's guide to film. No viewer wants

to waste the price of a ticket; economically film reviewers serve a necessary function. However, by expanding criticism to include a critique of the whole film process, by writing for periodicals open to a broader perspective on women and film, and by working to help the practical cause of women in film, we can go beyond our assigned role as consumer guide. Already, women critics have joined forces with women's studies courses and women's film festivals. Key articles in magazines have been the reviews of the New York Women's Film Festival, articles in two issues of *Film Library Quarterly*, special articles on women directors and women's film in *Take One*, *Film Comment* and *The Velvet Light Trap*. Because of these articles and the brochure on women's films from the Toronto Women's Film Festival and the list of women's films available in the United States that is published by the Women's History Research Center, women, ourselves as critics included, are just beginning to know the *range* of women's films.¹¹ Some of these films are being shown in courses, but too often just the same few are shown over and over again. Women are pressuring the local film societies to include women's films in their programs; and hopefully, we as critics will be able to devote ourselves to a serious study of these films. The distribution of the films women are making may well be aimed at the 16mm circuit or the exchange of video tapes.

Such films deserve more than a liberal viewing, where anything made by a woman is held as equally valuable as anything else. Rather we must use our capacity as feminist critics to see what is in these films and to see how these films fit (or can fit—and we can promote them) into the film process as a whole. Already a film such as the *The Woman's Film* has proven its effectiveness in women's courses because it deals with women's issues across class and race lines and considers economic issues as well as personal ones. We do not have to promote just films having a didactic function, but I would hope that it would be from feminist critics that a woman director gets her best critique.

Notes

¹Claire Clouzot's *Le Cinema francais depuis la nouvelle vague* is the best available history of French film since the early 1950s. It is published by the Alliance Francaise in their series, "Où en est la France?" (Paris: Ferdinand Nathan, 1972). Marie-Claire Ropars-Wuilleumier wrote film reviews for *Esprit* throughout the late fifties and sixties, and is the best reviewer I have ever read. In two or three pages of *Esprit* she gave a wealth of analysis and detail not found in the work of any other critic. Her collected reviews are in *L'Écran de la mémoire* (Paris: Seuil, 1970). In addition, her book *De la littérature au cinéma* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1970) is a structuralist study of film narrative and film history. Her theory is clear-sighted and a neglected contribution to the subject of film structure. Penelope Gilliatt writes for *The New Yorker* and Renata Adler was the *New York Times* daily reviewer. Adler's collected criticism is available in book form in *A Year in the Dark*. Susan Sontag's essays "Theatre and Film" and "Godard" are key works in both of these areas: the first can be found in *Against Interpretation* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, 1966); the second in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, 1969). Gilliatt and Sontag have both successfully entered the field of filmmaking.

²This schema was first presented in a paper, "A Systematic Approach to Audience Response to Film" by Charles Kleinhans and myself at the Student Conference on Film Study organized by Oberlin College and held in Washington, D.C. in April, 1973.

³Such an approach was taken by Bertolt Brecht in his long essay on what happened to the film of the *Threepenny Opera* and the lawsuit that he brought to court. A summary of the essay can be found in *Cinéaste* V:2 (Spring, 1972), pp. 34-37.

⁴The radical critic wages what Umberto Eco calls "semiotic guerrilla warfare," by which he means that we must enhance the gap between the transmitted and the received message so as to broaden the receivers' freedom. To cite Eco on this tactic—"In political activity it is not indispensable to change a given message: it would be enough (or, perhaps better) to change the attitude of the audience, so as to induce a different decoding of the message—or in order to isolate the intentions of the transmitter and thus to criticize them. In this sense, semiotics becomes not only a cognitive discipline which enables us to understand how communication works, but also a pragmatic activity, intended to transform communication processes." "Towards a Semiotic Enquiry into the Television Message," *Working Papers in Cultural Studies* 3, p. 121. This journal which offers a radical approach to cultural studies, is published by the Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies at the University of Birmingham, England, and the Spring '71 issue of the journal has a bibliography of works in English on kinesics, proxemics, and semiology—all areas of non-verbal communication applicable to the study of film.

⁵Eco has also written an important essay explaining how convention enters in as a determining factor on each level of film perception. This essay appears in French in his book *La Structure absente* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972) but is more accessible in the French journal *Communications* 15-16, in which issue one can also find a master bibliography on semiology. In English, less readily available, the article has been translated as "Articulations of the Cinematic Code" in *Cinemantics* 1 (January 1970).

⁶"Brezhnev-Mosfilm claims that it is attacking Nixon-Paramount, but in reality it is supporting it"—*Wind from the East*. I cannot make any excuses for Godard and Gorin's sexism in *Letter to Jane*, but their discussion of and search for a revolutionary film style in *Le Gai savoir*, *Vent d'est* (*Wind from the East*), *Pravda*, and *Luttes en Italie* (*Struggles in Italy*), plus their analysis of the reactionary nature of so-called "progressive" cinema are instructive for women who seek a totally new cinema, a non-sexist one.

⁷New Day Films, 267 W. 25th Street, New York, New York 10001.

Cinema Femina, New Feminist Talent, Inc., 250 W. 57th Street, New York, New York 10019.

Women's Film Co-op, 200 Main Street, Northampton, Massachusetts 01060.

⁸I do not wish to open up that old aesthetic controversy about form and content. Obviously there is no content without form and vice versa, and form is only the form of its content, content only the content of some form. Structuralists and semiologists use the distinction between signifier and signified, but in English it is difficult to read across -ier/-ied if one is not already used to the terms.

⁹I myself have written an article on the application of semiological analysis (specifically Roland Barthes *S/Z*) to film study. It will be in the spring issue of *Substances*, a journal published by the University of Wisconsin French Department which will devote an entire issue to structuralism and film.

¹⁰In the last issue of *Women and Film*, Sharon Smith described the pioneering work of Mary Ellen Bute and Marie Menken as experimental filmmakers. Women's film festivals in Toronto and New York have shown some experimental films by women, but these films are not as accessible for rental as narrative films, nor have we considered what role these films play in a feminist cinema. We have still not exploited super-8 technically as far as it will go. We neglect experimental film because of lack of money, knowledge, or support and reinforcement. I cannot separate out cause and effect here but only plead for a greater support of experimental filmmaking by women.

¹¹*Films By And/Or About Women* (Women's History Research Center, 2325 Oak Street, Berkeley, California 94708; \$5). This is a useful tool, a whole book of listings with a brief description of the content of each film. It does not make political and/or aesthetic judgments.